

REBALANCE TO ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: LEVERAGING VIETNAM TO  
COUNTER-BALANCE CHINA

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Strategic Studies

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

REBALANCE TO ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: LEVERAGING VIETNAM TO COUNTER-BALANCE CHINA, by Major Gary Dettloff, 81 pages.

After 10 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. is attempting to rebalance and has identified a need to pivot to the Pacific for long term national interest. The emergence of China, economically and militarily, is the key factor in the rebalancing strategy. The U.S. must commit more focus and resources to Asia and the Pacific if it desires to remain an influential power in the region. However, the U.S. finds itself in a fiscally constrained environment and implementing a force reduction in the military. A strategic partnership with Vietnam is a partial solution to address this dilemma. Vietnam appears to have the capabilities and willingness to provide the U.S. a counter-balance to China in the region. Relationships between Vietnam and the U.S. have warmed in recent years, conversely, Vietnam's relationship with China has cooled due to the perceived aggression of Beijing in the littoral region of the South China Sea. Beijing's controversial claims on the Spratly Islands have only intensified tensions in the territory and supports the pivot to the Pacific by the U.S.

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## ACRONYMS

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations        |
| BBC   | British Broadcasting Corporation              |
| CBCT  | Cavalry Brigade Combat Team                   |
| DOD   | Department of Defense                         |
| EUCOM | European Command                              |
| FDI   | Foreign Direct Investment                     |
| IBCT  | Infantry Brigade Combat Team                  |
| IED   | Improvised Explosive Device                   |
| ITAR  | International Trafficking in Arms Regulations |
| JGSDF | Japan Ground Self-Defense Force               |
| NMS   | National Military Strategy                    |
| NSS   | National Security Strategy                    |
| PACOM | Pacific Command                               |
| PRC   | People's Republic of China                    |
| QDR   | Quadrennial Defense Review                    |
| RAF   | Regionally Aligned Forces                     |
| SBCT  | Stryker Brigade Combat Team                   |
| SPP   | State Partnership Program (National Guard)    |
| THAAD | Terminal High Altitude Area Defense           |
| TPP   | Trans-Pacific Partnership                     |
| U.S.  | United States                                 |



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Our rebalance to Asia and the Pacific is yielding deeper ties with a more diverse set of allies and partners.<sup>1</sup>

— U.S. Government Executive Branch,  
*National Security Strategy*, February 2015

#### Pivot to the Pacific Strategy

The United States (U.S.) is committing to a strategy that is focused on the Pacific region, commonly referred to as the ‘pivot to the Pacific.’ After over 10 years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan the U.S. is adopting a strategy that will bring Asia and the Pacific into focus. One key factor for this refocus is the emergence of China. The pivot to the Pacific can be viewed as a move to moderate the tide of China’s growing influence in Asia, the Pacific region, and beyond.

China’s influence in Asia and the Pacific region is a growing concern for U.S. regional interests. China continues to widen its power through political, economic, and military means. The U.S. on the other hand, can be viewed as desiring a strategic end state of maintaining a balance with China in Asia and the Pacific, “We will closely monitor China’s military modernization and expanding presence in Asia, while seeking ways to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation.”<sup>2</sup> The goal is to remain diplomatically and militarily engaged in Asia and the Pacific, “The scope of our

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Executive Branch, *National Security Strategy*, 2015 (Washington, DC: U.S. Printing Office, 2015), i.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24.

cooperation with China is unprecedented, even as we remain alert to China's military modernization and reject any role for intimidation in resolving territorial disputes."<sup>3</sup>

The primary objective of this research is to examine the U.S. strategic shift to the Pacific and how we can leverage Vietnam's military to act as a counter-balance to China's growing regional influence. One of the questions that will be addressed is the current capability of the Vietnamese armed forces. Hence, in what aspect should the U.S. assist Vietnam in order to aid in maintaining the military balance in Asia and the Pacific region? Currently, the capabilities of the Chinese Army are unmatched in the region and therefore, China is able to shift more resources to modernizing its naval capabilities. The modernization of the Chinese Navy can provide a greater threat to the balance of power in the region. Not only does a more capable Chinese navy allow for greater control of shipping lanes and territorial disputes in the Pacific but the capabilities will pose a more dire threat to U.S. ships and forward bases. Therefore, the U.S. should consider adopting a strategy that can leverage military capabilities of regional partners to counter-balance China.

In order to counter China's naval modernization shift, the U.S. should leverage Vietnam's armed forces capabilities to offset Beijing's increased defense spending. Although the U.S. has strong historical military cooperation with South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines; Vietnam is the only one that has a shared land border with China which can be exploited. Vietnam is geographically positioned to engage and entice Chinese military planners to position more forces along their shared border therefore requiring

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government Executive Branch, *National Security Strategy, 2015*, i.

Beijing to commit more resources. The U.S. should explore this possibility and if able, increase military cooperation and investment in the Vietnamese military.

#### Primary Research Question

Should the U.S. leverage Vietnam to help counter-balance China's growing influence in Asia by developing the Vietnamese military capabilities in order to be a constant nuisance and threat to China?

#### Secondary Research Questions

Does the Vietnamese military have the capacity to effectively engage and occupy a significant portion of the Chinese military? If not, how much investment is required from the U.S. to develop this capacity?

#### Assumptions

Historically, the U.S. military has contracted at the conclusion of a major conflict. The assumption is that the U.S. military will continue this trend of downsizing as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wrap up. The U.S. is currently implementing a force reduction in all branches of its armed forces. This is particularly concerning for both the Army and Navy. The force reduction in the Army is projected to continue until 2020 when the Army is expected to bottom out at 420,000. The Navy is not fairing any better. Although, end strength in the Navy is expected to slightly increase by 3000 Sailors over the next five years, the number of ships in the navy's inventory is expected to decline. Therefore, the Army and Navy must continue to find innovative ways to remain effective and develop new coalition partnerships to offset force reduction.

It is further assumed that there remain a constituency within Congress that disagrees with the downsizing of the military and supports maintaining, if not increasing, current end strength. Led by former naval aviator and senior Senator John McCain (R-AZ), the outspoken constituency is calling for a bipartisan solution to end "mindless sequestration."<sup>4</sup>

### Limitations

Though discussed in some detail in order to provide reference, the research will explore the relationship between Vietnam and China, however, it is not intended to give a detailed history between the two countries. Covering the history between these two neighbors, which extends over a millennium, is beyond the scope of this research. Another limitation to this research will be in reference to the echelon of military units. Reference will remain at the Division and Corps level in order to provide a strategic level overview of military capabilities. Air power is a weakness of the Vietnamese military. The lack of an effective air force will limit this research to primarily the Army and to some extent the capabilities of their coastal navy.

### Scope and Delimitations

The research will include a brief study into the relationship between Vietnam and China. The time period covered for this research will be between the end of World War II and current date of this thesis. Subsequently, the relationship between Vietnam and the U.S. will cover the same period. This period provides the necessary historical background

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<sup>4</sup> Joe Gould, "Lawmakers Blast US Army Force Cuts," *Defense News*, July 10, 2015, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/budget/2015/07/08/lawmakers-blast-us-army-force-cuts/29883503/>.

and insights on how each may react to developments in military, political, and economic cooperation in the near term.

Research will be limited to how the U.S. can influence the Vietnamese military, in particular the army, capabilities in order to be a regular nuisance and threat to China. The U.S. must take a holistic approach to assisting Vietnam in modernizing its armed forces. Units postured along the border with China are the front line troops that will act as the fixing force in the event of a conflict. The lack of Vietnamese air power is off-set by a robust anti-air-defense network surrounding Hanoi. Vietnamese ground forces located in the southern region of the country will be included in the overall roll-up of total capabilities. However, their posture in the southern portion of the country consigns them primarily as the strategic reserve and to the defense of the southwestern border with Cambodia.

It is also necessary to direct some attention to the capabilities of the U.S. Navy. By exploring the current capabilities of the U.S. Navy and comparing it to the developing anti-ship capabilities of the Chinese military, we may realize that the effectiveness of our naval force is shrinking. This will support the conclusion that it is in the U.S.' interest to deal with a larger Chinese army than a more capable navy.

Finally, resources and capabilities within the U.S. military, particularly of the army, are identified and recommendations offered that could aid Vietnam in building greater capacity to act as a leverage against China.

### Significance of Study

This thesis is intended to determine if leveraging Vietnam to counter-balance China is a viable military strategy. Research will attempt to identify how the U.S. can assist in improving the strengths and weaknesses of the Vietnamese military.

### Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to expand the U.S. strategies discussion on alternative approaches to effective solutions to national security. As the debate continues to grow on how the U.S. can maintain a forward deployed military in a fiscally constrained environment, novel perspectives should be contemplated to offset cost and risk. Unconventional approaches will require new military partnership with previous foes, who are eager to begin a new era in military, political, and economic relationships.

This thesis will attempt to present a fresh approach on how the U.S. can move toward new partnerships in Asia. In particular, the research will focus on Vietnam and what capabilities it can bring to the table to assist the U.S. in its strategy to limit China's growing influence in the region. The thesis put forth the primary question of *should* the U.S. look to Vietnam as a potential partner in a counter-balance strategy against China? The secondary question will examine the capabilities and investments which are needed to support such a strategy by the U.S. Chapter 2 will discuss how the counter-balance strategy against China can be employed successfully. This chapter will also examine the relationships between the three countries to identify the feasibility of certain strategies adopted. Vietnam is the pivotal nation within this tri-party relationship discussion, it is the strategic prize to win that both the U.S. and China covet.

Chapter 3 builds on this theme by presenting the methodology used to conduct research and organize the data. Chapter 4 is an important chapter as it provides the in-depth analysis of the research. This analysis will attempt to produce feasible and acceptable recommendations for moving forward on an alternative strategy to counter-balance China. The final chapter will provide the conclusion and recommendations. The proposed recommendations will include a number of means for implementing the strategy and highlight the risks associated with each.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

“The world has witnessed China’s more aggressive stance on the South China Sea and the East China Sea, more missiles aimed at Taiwan, and a steadily rising Chinese military budget. . . . There is a growing nervousness among China’s neighbors about all of this, and America has responded by ‘pivoting’ from the Atlantic to the Pacific.”<sup>5</sup> The U.S. must find innovative solutions to shifting more resources to the Pacific with a focus on China. However, the paradox is that the U.S. is currently in a fiscally constrained environment and in the midst of a force reduction period. In addition to resources within its control, the U.S. must consider alternative partnerships and strengthening cooperation with nations in Asia that share a common suspicion of China’s motives.

A partnership that the U.S. may consider is one with a former foe: Vietnam. This familiar Southeast Asian country would be an ideal partner to start developing better relations with, due its proximity to, past conflict with, and mistrust of China. Vietnam would provide several military options to the U.S. that would be viable in a strategy to counter-balance China in Asia and the Pacific region.

#### Vietnam–China Relationship

First, it is important to define the nature of the relationship Vietnam currently has with China in order to determine the feasibility of pursuing a partnership. The history of

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Beardson, *Stumbling Giant: The Threats to China’s Future* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 360.

Vietnam and China spans over a millennium. For the purpose of this research, the relationship will be limited to the history period between the end of World War II and current date of this paper. Vietnam's history with China has been at times turbulent and filled with conflict, and relations have chilled and tensions increased between the two countries since the ending of the Vietnam War and reunification.

The tension between the two countries stems from a perception by China that a reunified Vietnam is a strong and influential power to their south. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger noted that, "Even before the end of the long Vietnam wars, first with the French seeking to reclaim their colony after World War II, and then with the U.S. from 1963 to 1975, both Beijing and Hanoi began to realize that the next contest would be between themselves for dominance in Indochina and Southeast Asia."<sup>6</sup>

Relations between Vietnam and China began to sour starting in 1975. In 1975 the Cambodian government fearing that a united Vietnam had intentions of regional dominance, launched an attack on the Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc, with sporadic clashes occurring until 1978. In retaliation, and fearing a growing strategic and political tie between China and Cambodia, Vietnam launched a major offensive into Cambodia with over 150,000 troops. The speed at which Vietnamese troops dominated Cambodian forces and took the capital of Phnom Penh was reminiscent of the German's Blitzkrieg into Poland in 1939, persuading China that Vietnam was a military opponent that may have to be dealt with in the future.

In 1979, Chinese forces eventually crossed over into North Vietnam in order to put pressure on Hanoi to withdraw from Cambodia. The tensions between Vietnam and

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2011), 344.

China continued to play out in the prolonged border war of 1979-1990. The invasion of Chinese troops across the Vietnamese border was bloody for both sides and the invasion lasted for 27 days. Although both sides claim military victory, Sino-Vietnamese expert and former Secretary of State Henry J. Kissinger concluded that the Vietnamese military out performed Chinese regular forces in the 27-day war.<sup>7</sup> The Vietnamese strategy of defending Hanoi with regular Army troops and using the border militia to engage the invading Chinese regular forces proved to be successful. Vietnamese border militias were able to conduct guerilla attacks on Chinese formations and lure Chinese forces into a costly village to village fight.

Strategically the Chinese wanted to engage the Vietnamese regular army forces in a decisive battle in order to inflict heavy casualties and send a message to Vietnam reminding them of the great power laying North of their border. However, Vietnamese regular army troops remained in reserve defending Hanoi. Despite heavy losses, China has claimed that their military objectives were met by crossing the border with over 200,000 troops and occupying several villages along the border, “Though tactical and operational inadequacies became apparent in the aftermath of the three-week fight, China still claimed strategic victory.”<sup>8</sup> The Vietnamese however, viewed it differently, and claimed their militia was able to withstand and repel Chinese regular army forces without committing Vietnamese regular forces. The performance of the Vietnamese should not have been a surprise; Vietnam had been in a continuous state of war since 1946.

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<sup>7</sup> Kissinger, 345.

<sup>8</sup> Major Christopher M. Gin, U.S. Army, “How China Wins: A Case Study of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War” (Master’s thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2015), 2.

### Challenging China

“While the U.S. fought to preserve an independent South Vietnam against the communist North, it was the unified Vietnam that emerged under communist control with America’s defeat that would prove a far greater threat to China than it would to the U.S.”<sup>9</sup> Vietnam and China have for now settled their border dispute by signing the 1999 Border Pact, which in addition to reducing tension on the border region, has opened the door for diplomatic exchanges between Hanoi and Beijing. However, a new type of border tension has arisen to replace the old land border dispute, this time it is over the control of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

Robert D. Kaplan’s, *Asia’s Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*, reflects on the influence of China in Asia, specifically in the South China Sea, and how it is creating instability and fear within the region. Kaplan points to one Southeast Asian country that is willing and able to provide opposition to China’s heavy handed techniques; that country is Vietnam, “If China can break off Vietnam they’ve won the South China Sea.”<sup>10</sup> Figure 1 shows the disputed boundaries of the territorial waters between Vietnam, China, and the Philippines.

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<sup>9</sup> Kissinger, 342-343.

<sup>10</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia’s Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York, NY: Random House, 2014), 53.

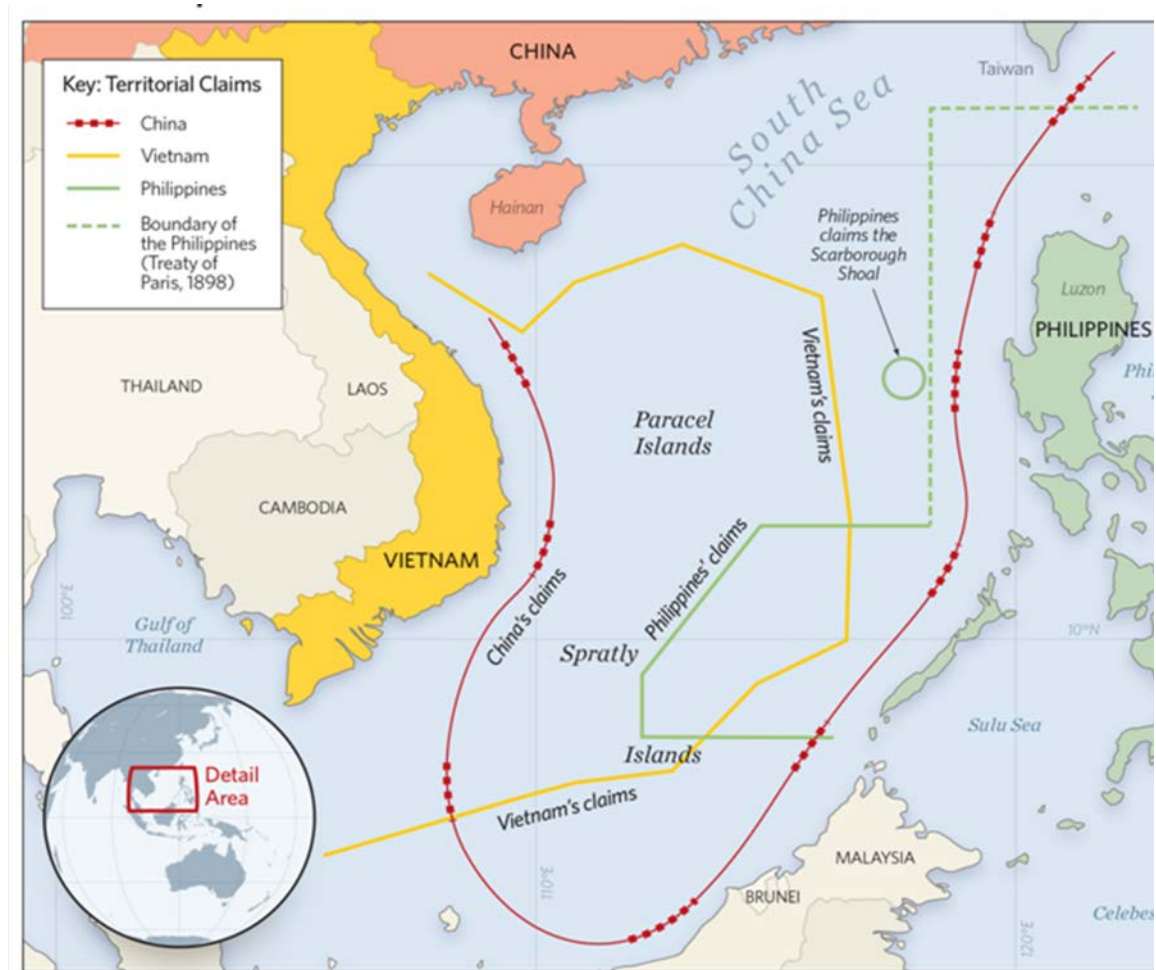


Figure 1. Areas of Dispute in the South China Sea

Source: R. B. Cribb, "Areas of Dispute in the South China Sea," accessed October 10, 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf).

After World War II, both China and South Vietnam claimed and controlled half of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. To maintain Communist China's support during the Vietnam War, Hanoi recognized China as the sole ownership of the Spratly Islands, and in essence, gave up Vietnamese rights to the Island chain. In a twist of political wrangling, Hanoi reclaimed part of the Spratly Islands after reunification. Due to the potential oil deposits in the vicinity of the Spratly Islands, tensions have once again

surfaced. Vietnam has since increased its military presence in the South China Sea along with new legal justification for ownership, “Senior Colonel Dzung Kim Le explained that the very expansion of the Chinese economy-however slowed-will lead to a more pronounced naval presence in the South China Sea, coupled with the desire to exploit energy resources there.”<sup>11</sup>

In an effort to counter Chinese military buildup in the South China Sea, Vietnam has begun its search to upgrade its maritime reconnaissance aircraft, fighter jets, and drones to counter the military move by China. According to Oliver Holmes, an analyst at the Australian Defense Force Academy, “Vietnam badly needs modern maritime reconnaissance aircraft to patrol its vast maritime domain” and that “Reports that Vietnam has canvassed widely with European and American defense contractors fits its profile of extensive market research and bargaining for the best package deal.”<sup>12</sup> According to Holmes, Vietnam recognizes that it cannot stand toe-to-toe with China in a conventional conflict, however, it can “give China a bloody nose in battle.”<sup>13</sup> Indirectly, Vietnam is demonstrating that it is willing to be a strategic partner with anyone, particularly with the U.S., as a counter-balance to China. As a result, China is negotiating with Vietnam to minimize the militarization of the South China Sea.

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<sup>11</sup> Kaplan, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Oliver Holmes and Agencies, “Vietnam sends message to China with bid to buy fighter jets and drones,” *The Guardian*, June 5, 2015, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/05/vietnam-message-china-fighter-jets-drones-south-china-sea>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

It is Kaplan's opinion that Vietnam is the key to keeping China from outright dominating the South China Sea and claiming the Spratly and Parcel Islands, "Malaysia is lying low, Brunei has solved its problem with China, Indonesia has no well-defined foreign policy on the subject, the Philippines has few cards to play despite that country's ingenious boisterousness and incendiary statements, Singapore is capable but lacks size. It's all up to Vietnam, in other words."<sup>14</sup> If the need arises, Vietnam is a country willing and able to confront China militarily.

### Vietnam-U.S. Relationship

The U.S. began its turbulent involvement with Vietnam during the First Indochina War, 1946-1954. By 1954, the French were exhausted and thoroughly defeated, leaving the responsibility of an "anti-communist policy in Asia" to the U.S.<sup>15</sup> Concerned that Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh would eventually take control of Vietnam, the National Security Council in 1954 favored a military rather than a political approach to counter the Viet Minh struggle."<sup>16</sup> The U.S. attempted to develop a "united action" to deal with the Viet Minh threat but was unable to build support for the approach, except for Thailand and the Philippines.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, U.S. involvement in Vietnam steadily increased from military advisors to strategic bombing with Operation Rolling Thunder and Operation

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<sup>14</sup> Kaplan, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Gravel, U.S. Senator, "Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force," The Pentagon Papers, 1972, accessed May 2, 2016, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent5.htm>, 53-75.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Arc Light, to the escalation of ground combat operation in 1965 with the deployment of 3,500 Marines to South Vietnam. However, by 1973, U.S. combat troops began to withdraw from Vietnam and in April 1975 the last U.S. personnel was airlifted out of Saigon.

Today, the U.S. seeks new partners in Asia, to include Vietnam, to help maintain a forward presence in the Pacific region, “Security cooperation activities are at the heart of our efforts to provide a stabilizing presence in forward theaters. These build relationships that serve mutual security interests. They also develop partner military capabilities for self-defense and support to multinational operations. Through such activities, we coordinate with other U.S. agencies and mission partners to build cultural awareness and affirm relationships that increase regional stability.”<sup>18</sup>

In 2010, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) mentioned the need to develop “new strategic relations” and “identified Vietnam as a key partner.”<sup>19</sup> This is an indication that the U.S. recognizes Vietnam as a major player in Southeast Asia that could play a vital role in counter-balancing China. However, this does not mean that the U.S. is ready to consider Vietnam for a strategic partnership just yet. It is more like an “improve relations” or an “understanding of mutual understanding” between the two

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<sup>18</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the U.S. of America 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Printing Office, 2015), accessed January 18, 2016, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015\\_National\\_Military\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Carl Thayer, “8 Developments in US-Vietnam Relations Show Emerging Partnership,” *The Diplomat*, July 13, 2015, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/8-developments-in-us-vietnam-relations-show-emerging-partnership/>.



countries.<sup>20</sup> This would be similar to how Australia views Vietnam in which Vietnam is a “comprehensive partnership” and not a strategic partnership. Cuong T. Nguyen explains that, a “Comprehensive partnership” is one that is an array of cooperative efforts in the field of security and trade.<sup>21</sup>

One road block preventing greater Vietnamese and U.S. military cooperation is the United States’ International Trafficking in Arms Regulation (ITAR.) The International Trafficking in Arms Regulation is a set of U.S. government regulations on the export and import of defense related articles and services.<sup>22</sup> Vietnam continues to push to be fully removed from the International Trafficking in Arms Regulations list which prevents the U.S., in certain capacities, from sharing military information and materials with Vietnam. In place since 1984, the ban was relaxed in 2007 to allow for the sale of non-lethal defense articles and services on a case-by-case basis.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, remarks made by Senator Webb on a 2011 visit to Hanoi confirmed that discussions between the two governments on the status of the embargo are taking place.<sup>24</sup> Efforts by

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Cuong T. Nguyen, “The Dramatic Transformation in US-Vietnam Relations: A historic visit this week indicates just how close the two former foes have become,” *The Diplomat*, July 2, 2015, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/the-dramatic-transformation-in-us-vietnam-relations/>.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of State, Directorate of Defense Trade Controls, *The International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) 22 CFR 120-130*, accessed March 20, 2016, [https://www.pmddtc.state.gov/regulations\\_laws/itar.html](https://www.pmddtc.state.gov/regulations_laws/itar.html).

<sup>23</sup> James Bellacqua, “The China Factor in U.S.-Vietnam Relations,” Center for Naval Analyses-China Studies, March 4, 2012, accessed February 4, 2016, <http://www.cna.rog/DRM-2012-U-00184-Final.pdf>, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

Vietnam are starting to payoff, in August 2014, Senator John McCain, former prisoner of war in Vietnam, gave remarks in support of Vietnam's effort for full removal from the list.<sup>25</sup> Vietnam might prefer to reduce its dependence on Russian armaments and acquire more advanced U.S. military technologies. However, a Vietnamese newspaper interview with outgoing U.S. Ambassador Michael Michalak suggests that any further relaxation in the embargo will be contingent upon improvements in Vietnam's human rights record.<sup>26</sup>

The meeting between President Obama and General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong of Vietnam on July 7, 2015, may be a new indication that improved military relations between the two countries are starting to warm, "Administration officials are eager to improve relations with Vietnam, viewing it as a key to Mr. Obama's goal of rebalancing U.S. foreign policy toward Asia."<sup>27</sup> First, both sides agree that the situation in the South China Sea is a serious concern and that China must be negotiated with in order to resolve the situation peacefully. Second, a united effort must be displayed in any negotiations and if necessary any subsequent follow-on military cooperation. Finally in October that same year, President Obama opened the door for the U.S. Department of Defense and Vietnam

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<sup>25</sup> Voice of Vietnam, "John McCain supports stronger Vietnam-US ties," August 2014, accessed March 13, 2016, <http://english.vov.vn/diplomacy/john-mccain-supports-stronger-vietnamus-ties-279841.vov>.

<sup>26</sup> Bellacqua, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Dave Boyer, "Obama says he'll visit Vietnam soon, meets with leader Nguyen Phu Trong," *Washington Post*, July 7, 2015, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/7/obama-says-hell-visit-vietnam-soon-meets-with-lead/>.

Ministry of National Defense to increase military cooperation in technology and maritime security.<sup>28</sup>

On February 4, 2016, the U.S. entered into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement with eleven other countries to build economic cooperation. The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a key economic agreement that will strengthen relations and cooperation with Pacific Rim countries and has the potential to translate into strategic gains. According to Cuong T. Nguyen, the Trans-Pacific Partnership will help the U.S. develop “soft balancing strategies” against China.<sup>29</sup> In essence, the Trans-Pacific Partnership becomes an economic line of effort to combat the growing Chinese influence in the region.

#### China’s Military Posture

At this point, it is necessary to examine the size, structure, and future of China’s military to gain a foundational understanding of its capabilities. China recognized that the need for a large, more capable Navy is the key in the future for regional and possibly global influence. This realization may have been fostered by U.S. naval actions during the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1995-1996. These reinforced China’s growing awareness that having a more modern and capable Navy is crucial to their national security.

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<sup>28</sup> John Sifton, “US resumes arms sales to Vietnam despite latter’s “exceedingly poor human rights record,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 6, 2014, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://business-humanrights.org/en/us-resumes-arms-sales-to-vietnam-despite-latter%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cexceedingly-poor-human-rights-record%E2%80%9D-says-human-rights-watch>.

<sup>29</sup> Nguyen.

In 1995, Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui visited Cornell University to deliver a "Taiwan democratization experience" speech. China expected the U.S. to deny a visa to President Lee Teng-hui, however, after much debate in Congress a visa was granted. China felt betrayed with what they considered a step backward in U.S.-China relations. China showed its displeasure by conducting a missile test in the Taiwan Straits in July and August of that year. China also conducted naval and amphibious operations in the vicinity of the straits to send a clear message of operational reach. The U.S. responded by moving two Carrier Strike groups to the Straits for a show of force in support of Taiwan and as a demonstration that the U.S. was still an influential power in the region. This event would be the catalyst for China's military spending increase, "After the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996, China began investing heavily in its defense capabilities. Defense spending has grown about 11 percent per year since then, adjusted for inflation. Much of that modernization has focused on developing air and naval forces, conventionally armed ballistic missiles, and counter-space and cyber capabilities. Recently announced cuts to the number of land forces are very much in keeping with that focus."<sup>30</sup>

How concerned does the U.S. have to be with China's military build-up? There is no question that China's military is substantially larger than the U.S. military. Figure 2 gives a quick glance at the numbers the U.S. is facing with China's military arsenal. The numbers representing the U.S. includes the operational Army National Guard

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<sup>30</sup> Eric Heginbotham, "China's Military Modernization: Eric Heginbotham and Michael Chase in Conversation," RAND Corporation, 2015, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/09/chinas-military-modernization-eric-heginbotham-and.html>.

contribution due to the fact that 55 percent of combat structure resides in that component.

| China        |  | Budget*                   |   | US        |
|--------------|--|---------------------------|---|-----------|
| \$129bn      |   | Total                     |  | \$581bn   |
| 2.1%         |  | % of GDP                  |   | 3.5%      |
| 2,333,000    |   | Personnel                 |  | 1,433,150 |
| Equipment    |  |                           |   |           |
| 6,540        |   | Tanks                     |   | 2,785     |
| 1,667        |   | Fighter aircraft          |   | 2,397     |
| 6 prototypes |   | of which stealth fighters |   | 246       |
| some         |   | Heavy UAVs                |   | 517       |
| 69           |   | Submarines                |   | 73        |
| 1            |   | Aircraft carriers         |   | 10        |
| 17           |   | Destroyers                |   | 62        |
| 66           |  | ICBM launchers            |  | 450       |

Figure 2. China and US Military Comparison

Source: BBC, “China military parade commemorates WW2 victory over Japan,” September 3, 2015, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-34125418>; International Infrastructure Support System-World Bank, 2014.

China has a standing Army of over 1.6 million men and 510,000 reserves with access to millions more if needed. China believes that its Army is already a formidable force unmatched by any other Asian country, “China holds Asia’s only operational combination of strategic, regional and possibly tactical nuclear weapons, and these systems are also in the midst of modernization programs. Consequently, no regional

power can challenge China's pre-eminence in continental Asia.”<sup>31</sup> With this understanding, China is able to shift resources to modernizing its naval capabilities, “China's greater focus on protecting its maritime interests was reflected in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, released in March 2011, which for the first time incorporated maritime development guidelines into a single chapter.”<sup>32</sup> However, China's weakness lies in its Navy.

China's navy, to include naval personnel, naval infantry, and naval air stands at 235,000. China recognizes that the size of its navy is a disadvantage. To correct this perceived shortcoming China has begun to increase the budget for the Navy in order to build a highly capable deep water navy with the capacity to provide forward projection. China's military and political analysts understand that China is years away to matching the capabilities of the U.S. In the meantime, China has taken the approach of developing land base weapon systems that can effectively engage naval vessels. These weapon systems, such as the Dong Feng 21 (DF-21), provides China the ability to engage U.S. carriers from 1800-2500 km off its coast.<sup>33</sup> Although the U.S. currently enjoys naval superiority, the new Chinese missile is tilting the balance of regional power by potentially

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<sup>31</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, “China as Regional Hegemon?” *Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies*, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/RegionalFinal%20chapters/Chapter6Godwin.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Chin-Hao Huang and Robert G. Sutter, “Managing Rising Tensions in the South China Sea,” *Comparative Connections*, September 2011, accessed March 15, 2016, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:7AukUYqYCJkJ:https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/19146/uploads+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy Bender, “A new Chinese anti-ship ballistic missile is bad news for US aircraft carriers,” *Business Insider*, October 21, 2015, accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-growing-military-power-may-make-us-aircraft-carriers-obsolete-2015-10>.

preventing the U.S. ships from entering certain regions in the South China Sea and beyond. Figure 3 illustrates Chinese missile capabilities.

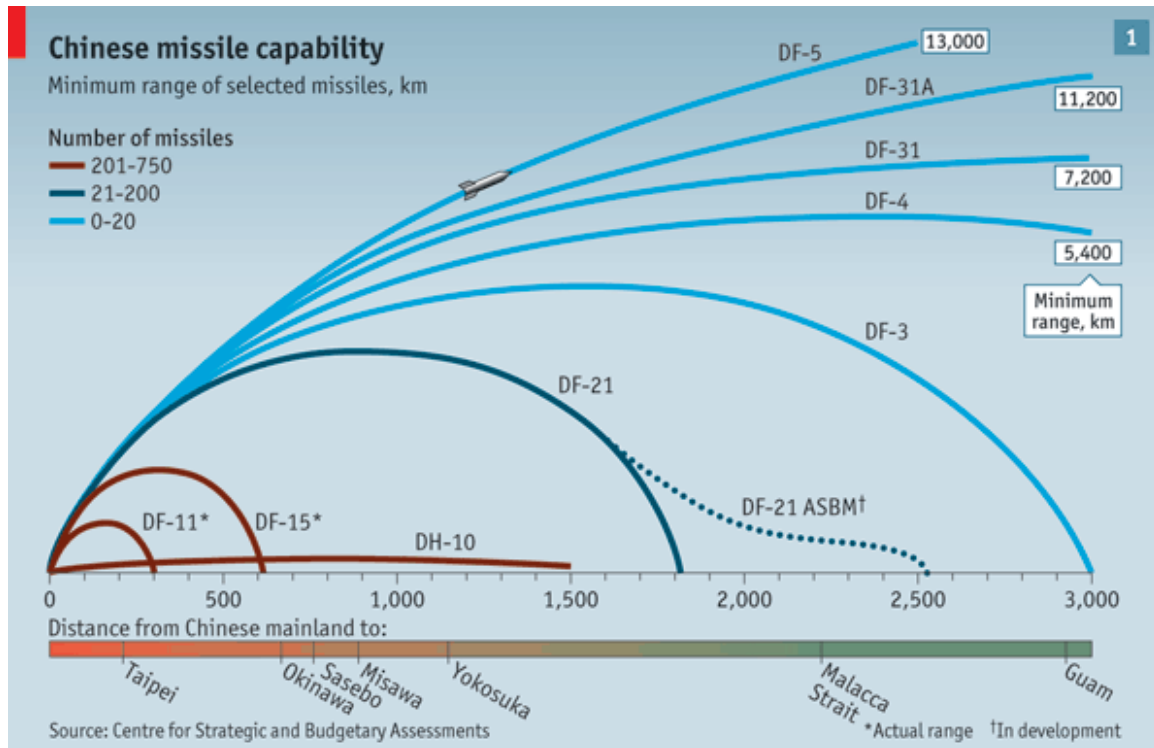


Figure 3. Chinese Missile Capability

Source: The Economist, “China’s Missile Ranges,” December 6, 2010, accessed November 28, 2015, [http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2010/12/chinese\\_missile\\_ranges](http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2010/12/chinese_missile_ranges).

### Economy: China’s Achilles Heal

“If other countries plan to contain or encircle China, Vietnam would be a priceless strategic element.”<sup>34</sup> Vietnam as a key strategic piece in any attempt to provide a check

<sup>34</sup> Beardson, 360.

and balance on China is essential according to Timothy Beardson. Beardson looked at Vietnam as one of the key Asian countries that can provide some needed friction against China's speedy rise in Asia, the Pacific, and beyond. Beardson recognizes the importance China's growing influence has in Asia and the Pacific and draws similar parallels with Keating and Kissinger. It is interesting that one of the foci of his research included 'Nervous Neighbors', which gives emphasis to Vietnam as the key to balancing in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea. Beardson surveys Southeast Asian countries that China is attempting to influence through economic, diplomatic, or military means.

Beardson believes that if Vietnam can solve its economic problems, it has the potential to becoming a regional powerhouse.<sup>35</sup> Economically, Vietnam continues to experience economic growth, has access to large energy reserves, and is situated strategically on the major international oil route between the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea.<sup>36</sup> Countries such as Australia, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. continue to invest in the economic infrastructure in Vietnam. International business centers are sprouting up throughout Vietnam, in particular within the Southern region near Ho Chi Minh City. These new business centers include new buildings, public transportation hubs, clean streets, shops, and government offices.

The young and technology savvy population of Vietnam is considered by many to be a key resource. Vietnam is the thirteenth most populous country in the world and is expected to move into the eleventh position by 2050, surpassing Japan and Russia. The use of technology among Vietnam's population, and most importantly its youth, is

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<sup>35</sup> Beardson, 360.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



promising. Literacy rates in Vietnam stands at, 94.5 percent, which is above the world average of 86.1 percent.<sup>37</sup> It is within this demographics that a more favorable view of the U.S. persist as figure 4 displays.

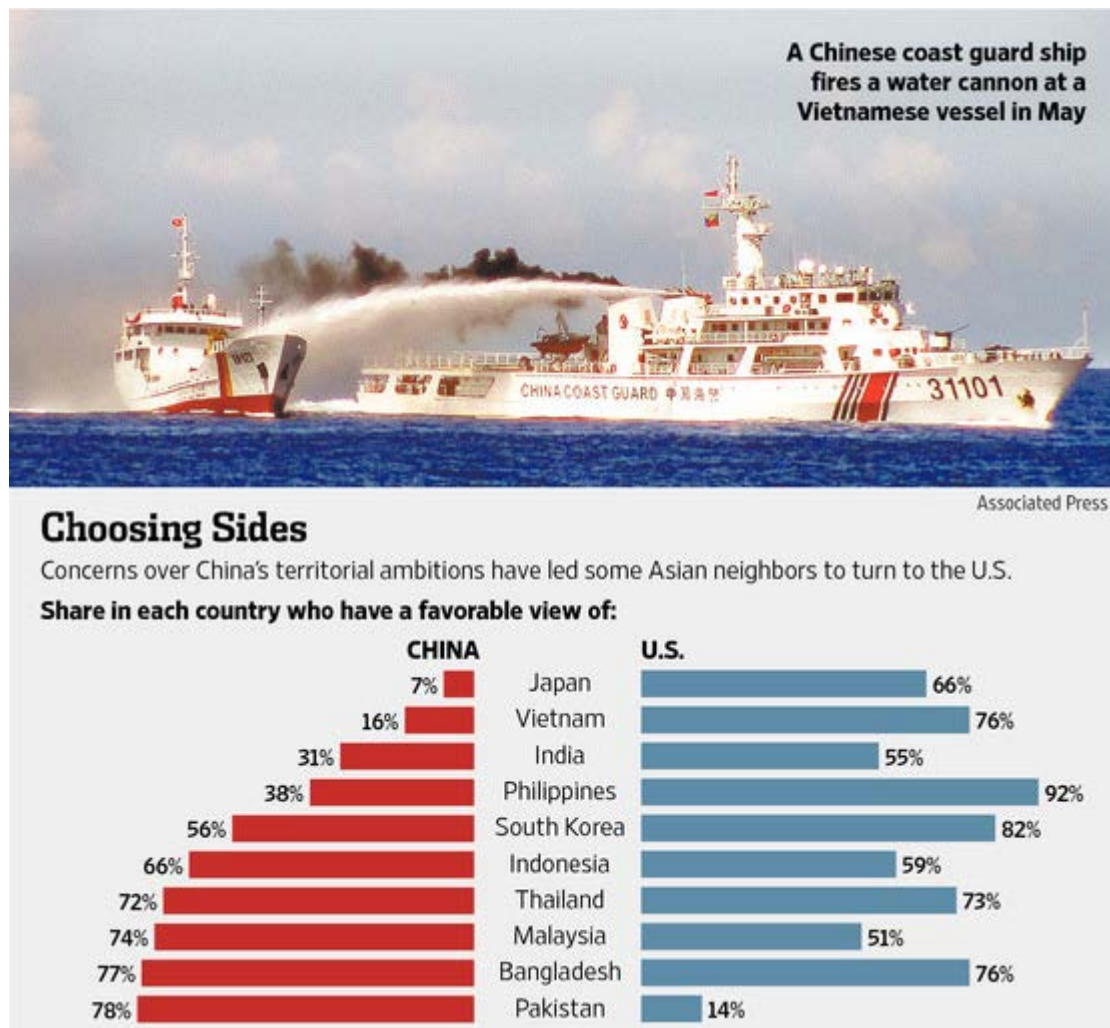


Figure 4. Vietnam's Opinion of China and the U.S.

Source: Andrew Browne, "Asian Nations' Fears of War Elevated as China Flexes Muscle, Study Finds," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2014, accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/asian-nations-fears-of-war-elevated-as-china-flexes-muscle-study-finds-1405361047>.

<sup>37</sup> CIA, "World Fact Book," accessed February 5, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html>.

Labor cost in Vietnam continues to be competitive, especially compared against China's rising labor cost. In 2007, Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization and in 2010 became part of the 12 nation Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement. Both of these economic moves has helped spur economic growth and increase interest from foreign investors.

While economic development benefits the country as a whole and improves the quality of life for the population, it is the method for providing the means for military build-up. Since joining the World Trade Organization, there has been a noticeable investment surge in Vietnam. From 2008 to 2013 there was a 25 percent, on average, increase in foreign investment in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jacqueline Yuen, "Vietnam's Logistics Market: Exploring the Opportunities," Hong Kong Trade Development Council Research, January 20, 2015, accessed February 5, 2016, <http://hkmb.hktdc.com/en/1X0A0XQJ/hktdc-research/Vietnam%E2%80%99s-Logistics-Market-Exploring-the-Opportunities>.



Figure 5. Foreign Direct Investment in Vietnam

*Source:* HKTDC Research, “Vietnam’s Logistics Market: Exploring the Opportunities,” January 20, 2015, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://hkmb.hktdc.com/en/1X0A0XQJ/hktdc-research/Vietnam%E2%80%99s-Logistics-Market-Exploring-the-Opportunities>.

The sources of these investment are mostly from Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, however, the U.S. and Australia are also making significant investment contributions. Figure 6 reflects the countries that are investing in the Vietnamese economy and demonstrates that the forecast remains positive for continued foreign investment and economic growth in Vietnam, “Vietnam received an estimated record \$9.65 billion in actual foreign direct investment (FDI) so far this year [2015], with strong inflows going to the manufacturing sector, a key driver for the country’s economic growth.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ho Binh Minh, “Update 1-Vietnam’s FDI inflow hits record high so far in 2015,” *Reuters*, September 25, 2015, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/vietnam-economy-fdi-idUSL4N11V1QH20150925>.

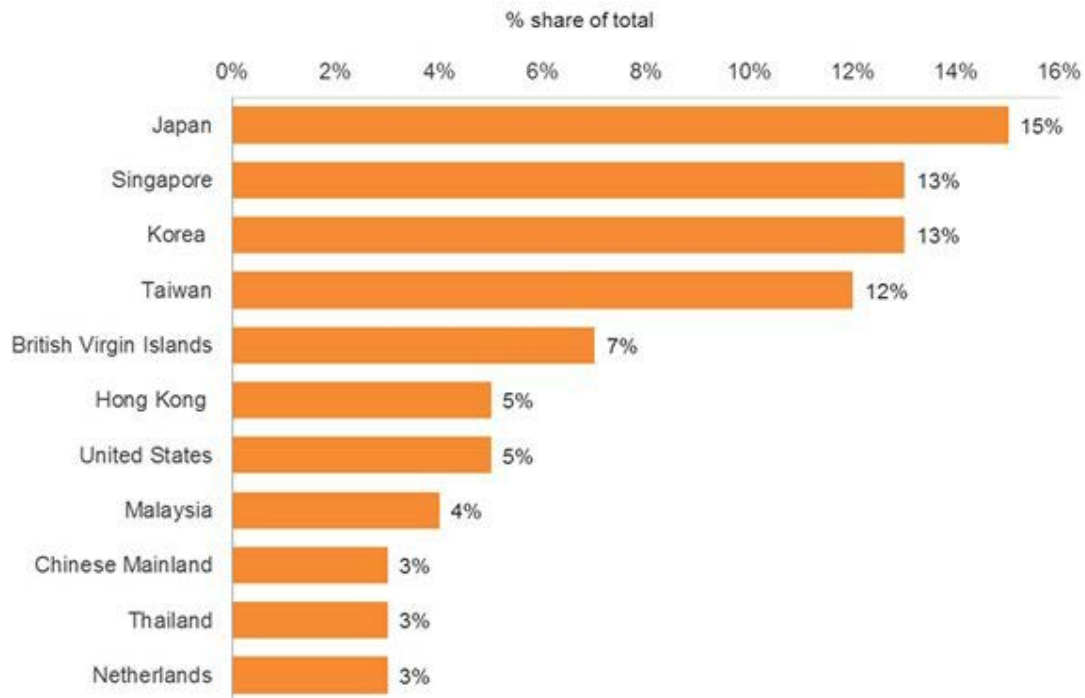


Figure 6. Major Sources of Foreign Direct Investment

*Source:* HKTDRC Research, “Vietnam’s Logistics Market: Exploring the Opportunities,” January 20, 2015, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://hkmb.hktdc.com/en/1X0A0XQJ/hktdc-research/Vietnam%E2%80%99s-Logistics-Market-Exploring-the-Opportunities>.

There can be an expectation that the U.S. will continue to steadily increase investments in Vietnam once the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement has time to be fully implemented. Investment in Vietnam is expected to continue to trend upward in the near future. It can be viewed that the benefits are twofold for the U.S. Beardson points out that although China remains Vietnam’s largest trade partner, the U.S. is the biggest export destination for Vietnamese goods.<sup>40</sup> American companies have greater access to an inexpensive labor force in Vietnam that is also an alternative to China which enables lower prices for merchandise sold back in the U.S. The increase trade and

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<sup>40</sup> Beardson, 357.

economic partnership benefits both countries but the true value in such cooperation is security, “Vietnam is building a relationship with America based on trade, investment, security and military cooperation.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, the benefit to the U.S. of Vietnam’s economic rise would be to provide another ‘concern’ for China, “America is encouraging a military build-up by Vietnam.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 360.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology I used during my research was the qualitative data collection method. I used various government documents and databases, books, articles, and journals in order to collect data for the thesis. There is a large volume of information on the topic that has been published. However, the time constraint on the research became the decisive factor in the amount of material that was reviewed. The volume of information on the topic required that the research be narrowed in its focus therefore; only relationships between Vietnam, China, and the U.S. were explored.

In Chapter 1, the primary objective of the research has presented and described the strategic pivot to the Pacific by the U.S. This suggested the strategic direction that the U.S. should pursue in order to counter-balance China's growing power. The primary and secondary questions were then posed to help frame the objective of the pivot. The primary and secondary questions brought the central theme into the research: Can Vietnam act as the counter-balance force to China in Asia and the Pacific? Assumptions, limitations, and challenges were also identified within this chapter to maintain the focus of the research.

Chapter 2 consisted of an extensive review of various articles, books, and journals published by experts in the field. Again, the amount of published material on the topic was substantial and caution had to be taken to maintain the focus of the research. Therefore, the selected literature focused on the recent history of the three countries and the current relationships. In addition, the strategic outlook and tendencies, to include the current military posture were examined in order to assist in answering the primary and

secondary question of the thesis. The chapter also helps set the reference point on the need for the U.S. to pivot to the Asia and the Pacific. This would include fiscal restraints experienced by the U.S. defense budget. Regionally Aligned Forces were introduced to provide background on one of the solutions the U.S. has developed in order to meet readiness and availability within this fiscally restraint environment. Finally, Chapter 2 examines the relationships between the three countries. Examining Vietnam's relationship with China is critical to understanding the recent history between the two countries which could provide an indication on how each would react to the involvement by the U.S. in Asia and the Pacific. The relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam was also examined to help determine if an increase in cooperation and partnership was a viable option.

Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the information collected throughout the research. The analysis of the collected information will provide the foundation for framing the questions posed in the thesis. By properly framing the question, solutions can be developed and presented in the final chapter.

Finally, chapter 5 will present solutions and recommendations for implementation in order to meet the end state of the U.S. pivot to the Pacific. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research on this topic. Further research on this topic will ensure that the strategy that the U.S.' pursue will remain relevant, acceptable, feasible, and executable.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

As we have done since World War II, the U.S. will continue to support the advance of security, development, and democracy in Asia and the Pacific. This is an important focus of the deepening partnerships we are building in Southeast Asia including with Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia.<sup>43</sup>

— National Security Strategy, February 2015

In this chapter, an analysis of the research is presented. The goal of this thesis is to add to the U.S. national security discussion on the pivot to the Pacific. The intended audience are those interested in Southeast Asia and U.S. national security issues. The research provides an approach for a partial solution to the issue of counter-balancing China in Asia and the Pacific. This research recognizes that the security and balance of Asia are important to maintaining a strong national security posture.

“Vietnam’s historical ambivalence and suspicions of China have increased in recent years due to concerns that China’s expanding influence in Southeast Asia is having a negative effect on Vietnam. These concerns, in turn, have led Vietnamese leaders to take steps to lessen their dependence on and vulnerabilities to Chinese influence.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Government Executive Branch, *National Security Strategy*, 2015, 24.

<sup>44</sup> *Vietnam: Electoral, Political Parties Laws and Regulations Handbook* (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, 2015), 249, accessed April 2, 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=YtiZCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA272&lpg=PA272&dq=Vietnam:+Electoral,+Political+Parties+Laws+and+Regulations+Handbook&source=bl&ots=SKoTQ3tmDs&sig=uf53McWQNcdUyUPhHZh2kohr8zQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi188-mjsvMAhVCyT4KHen-AoAQ6AEIzAB#v=onepage&q=Vietnam%3A%20Electoral%2C%20Political%20Parties%20Laws%20and%20Regulations%20Handbook&f=false>.



Vietnam is searching for a reliable partner due to the uncertainty with China. Vietnam has reached out to countries such as the U.S., Japan, Russia, and India in an attempt to bolster its position against an unpredictable China, especially in light of recent friction between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea, “Hanoi has sought broad engagement with all powers and countries, active international and regional integration together with the universally applicable principle of priority for the national interest.”<sup>45</sup> While improved relations with the U.S. is preferred, Hanoi must be conscious of a potential negative reaction by their neighbors to the north, “After all, it is not clear whether such an overt alliance is in the interest of both the United States and Vietnam as it would surely aggravate China and thus destabilize the situation [relations] further.”<sup>46</sup> This is reflected in a People’s Republic of China (PRC) commentary that, “disparaged Vietnam’s decision to cozy up to the United States and warned Hanoi to be mindful of the consequences.”<sup>47</sup>

Concurrently, the U.S. is searching for a reliable partner in Asia to guard against a rising China. “The Administration’s identification of the Asia-Pacific as a high-priority region for DoD and its announced intention to maintain and strengthen the U.S. military presence in the region come in the midst of a long term, large expansion of China’s

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<sup>45</sup> Ton Nu Thi Ninh, “The Right way to read US-Vietnam relations today,” *The Diplomat*, July 6, 2015, accessed March 4, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/the-right-way-to-read-us-vietnam-relations-today/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ngo Di Lan, “Vietnam between China and the United States: The Next Balancing Test Beacons,” *The Diplomat*, October 16, 2015, accessed March 5, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/vietnam-between-china-and-the-united-states-the-next-balancing-test-beckons/>.

<sup>47</sup> Bellacqua, 23.

military and China's frequently assertive behavior regarding its contested maritime territorial claims in the South and East China Seas. How the United States should respond to China's military modernization effort has emerged as a key issue in U.S. defense planning."<sup>48</sup> Simultaneously, the Obama Administration is taking steps to expand the George W. Bush Administration's push to diversify the range of U.S. partners to include India, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Vietnam. The Obama Administration is recognizing that these strategic partners are necessary for a successful pivot to the Pacific.

### Challenges for the U.S.

The U.S. faces a unique challenge in rebalancing to Asia and the Pacific during this period. The U.S. military is resetting after prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Ernesto Londono of the Washington Post, the cost of both wars could reach \$4 trillion once long term medical care for veterans are factored into the bottom line.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, some experts such as former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and Peter Beaumont of The Guardian, believe that the U.S. armed forces are fatigued and on the verge of breaking from the unexpected duration of the wars.<sup>50</sup> In March 2013 the Pentagon experienced budget sequestration due to the Budget Control Act of 2011.

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<sup>48</sup> Mark E. Manyin, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 2012), 19, accessed January 23, 2016, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Ernesto Londono, "Study: Iraq, Afghan war costs to top \$4 trillion," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2013, accessed April 2, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/study-iraq-afghan-war-costs-to-top-4-trillion/2013/03/28/b82a5dce-97ed-11e2-814b-063623d80a60\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/study-iraq-afghan-war-costs-to-top-4-trillion/2013/03/28/b82a5dce-97ed-11e2-814b-063623d80a60_story.html).

<sup>50</sup> Peter Beaumont, "Fatigue Cripples US Army in Iraq," *The Guardian/UK*, August 12, 2007, accessed April 2, 2016, <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2007/08/12/fatigue-cripples-us-army-iraq>.

According to Congressional Budget Office data, defense spending decreased 6.5 percent, from \$670.3 billion to \$626 billion for 2013.<sup>51</sup> The decrease in defense spending continues through 2014 and is only expected to start a slight upward trend of only 2.1 percent per year until 2020.<sup>52</sup> The upward trend of 2.1 percent is below the projected inflation rate of 2.3 for this same time period.<sup>53</sup> As a result, budget sequestration is forcing the military to reset priorities and rebalance its forces.

Due to this fiscally constrained environment, the Army has sought innovative ways to reduce personnel and capabilities to meet the requirements of the Budget Control Act of 2011. Leadership in the Army realized that a force reduction was an inevitable part of the future force. Reducing the number of Brigade Combat Teams is one method that the Army will use to accomplish this requirement. As the Army started to downshift its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, cuts in manpower began. Prior to 2012, the Army had 570,000 Soldiers and 45 Brigade Combat Teams. By the end of 2012, the Army had 80,000 fewer Soldiers and had eliminated 13 Brigade Combat Teams. The trends continue into 2018 when the target for Army end strength is 450,000 with a threat of further reduction to 420,000 if sequestration continues in 2016. Former Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno voiced concerns for the deep cut during congressional hearings and interviews, “If we don’t get the dollars and we continue down this road of

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<sup>51</sup> Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2014 to 2024* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office Publishing Group, 2014), 19, accessed January 20, 2016, [www.cbo.gov/publications/45010](http://www.cbo.gov/publications/45010).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Projected annual inflation rate in the United States from 2008 to 2020, The Statistics Portal, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/244983/projected-inflation-rate-in-the-united-states/>.

sequestration, it's going to put us in a readiness hole for five years. It's going to put us in a modernization hole for 10 years, and our ability to continue to meet our current missions will be challenged.”<sup>54</sup>

### A Partner in Vietnam

Since 1979, more than any other country, Vietnam has had the most armed confrontations with China. From cross-border skirmishes, confrontation at sea between the Chinese navy and Vietnamese fishermen, to the Spratly Island dispute, Vietnam has demonstrated that they will not stand quietly aside and let China apply its unchecked ambition in the region. In response to these incidents Hanoi is increasing its military capabilities to hedge against further Chinese aggression, “According to Vietnam’s most recent Defense Ministry White paper, released in 2009, Vietnam’s defense budget increased by nearly 70% between 2005 and 2008.”<sup>55</sup> However, the 70 percent increase translates to \$480 million and therefore, Vietnam requires additional military and economic aid in order to be a viable option for the U.S. pivot to the Pacific strategy.

Vietnam benefited from the Sino-Soviet split of the 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s. It received military and economic aid from the Soviet Union while still maintaining political relations, military cooperation, and economic trade with China. This became a competition by the two nations to win the alliance with Vietnam. After Vietnamese and

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<sup>54</sup> Michelle Tan, “Army lays out plan to cut 40,000 soldiers,” *Army Times*, July 10, 2015, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/07/09/army-outlines-40000-cuts/29923339/>.

<sup>55</sup> Mark E. Manyin, *U.S.-Vietnam relations in 2011: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 29.

U.S. naval forces clashed in the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, Vietnam began receiving increase military aid from China. During this period of cooperation, territorial issues between Vietnam and China were set aside. The military aid from China enabled Vietnam to persist in a war against a technologically superior military adversary “Over 100,000 Chinese military advisers aided North Vietnam during the war, and the possibility of China’s entering the war, as it had in Korea, kept the United States from sending ground forces into North Vietnam. In this sense, China sealed the U.S. defeat in Vietnam.”<sup>56</sup> Ironically, the U.S. is in a position to reverse this role and provide Vietnam with military aid to counter China’s aggressive posture. If Vietnam were to receive a similar type of aid from the U.S., as it did from China during the Vietnam War, then Vietnam can contribute to the counter-balance to China that the U.S. is seeking.

Vietnam has proven that it can, and will, oppose China with military forces if necessary. The Sino-Vietnam border war in 1979 demonstrated this fact. More importantly, it is China’s reaction after the war that can provide insight for a promising strategy that the U.S. can pursue with a new partnership with Vietnam. Vietnam was able to position close to 600,000 troops along the border, China countered by stationing approximately 400,000 troops along the border fearing a counter-attack. Because of this military posture, Vietnamese troops were able to occupy a significant portion of the Chinese military. The U.S. therefore, can utilize this same strategy today. By providing the Vietnamese with military aid, Vietnam can once again provide a threat to China, requiring China to redirect resources in order to defend the border with Vietnam.

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<sup>56</sup> Henry J. Kenny, *Shadow of the Dragon: Vietnam’s continuing struggle with China and the Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brassy’s, 2002), 9.

## U.S.-Vietnam Relations

Memories of the Vietnam War still linger in the minds of those who have fought and served in that corner of Southeast Asia. However, as the cliché goes, time heals all wounds, and today for most Americans, Vietnam is that country in Southeast Asia that levied a heavy toll on American lives and politics, “For most Americans, the Vietnam of today is of no concern, and the Vietnam of yesterday is viewed primarily as a battleground, a foreign policy or military blunder that cost the United States heavily.”<sup>57</sup> In 1994, nineteen years after the fall of Saigon, President William J. Clinton’s administration lifted the trade embargo with Vietnam and a year later diplomatic relations were re-established.

Since then, relations between the U.S. and Vietnam has steadily blossomed on three distinct lines of effort: economic trade, political exchange, and military cooperation. Economic ties are particularly strong: in 2012, U.S. FDI to Vietnam was \$1.1 billion, up 10.4 percent from 2011.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, according to Alexander Simoes of the Observatory of Economic Complexity, the U.S. is Vietnam’s largest export market with a total of \$24.5 billion in 2013.<sup>59</sup> Bilateral trade between the two countries rose from \$3 billion in 2001 to \$35 billion in 2015 and is expected to climb once the TPP agreement is signed.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kenny, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Office of the United States Trade Representative, “Vietnam,” accessed April 2, 2016, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/southeast-asia-pacific/vietnam>.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Simoes, “Vietnam,” *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/vnm/>

<sup>60</sup> Murray Hiebert, “Vietnam Today: Now known for its dynamic economy, Vietnam has slowly but surely taken its place among the nations of the world,” *The*

High-level diplomatic exchanges have become the norm and the two countries have begun to cooperate on issues of common concern. A recent visit in July 2015 by Vietnam's Secretary General of the Vietnam Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong, to Washington demonstrated a genuine effort to improve relations, "both leaders [President Obama and Nguyen Phu Trong] pledged to advance their 2013 agreement on comprehensive partnership by stepping up high-level visits and creating mechanisms to implement cooperation in the nine major areas outlined in the 2013 agreement."<sup>61</sup> Follow-on diplomatic events included a visit to Hanoi by Secretary of State John Kerry to commemorate the 20th anniversary of U.S.-Vietnam ties and a scheduled visit by President Barak Obama in 2016.

On the security front, U.S. Navy vessels have conducted 14 port visits since 2003 and conducted a joint naval exercise with their Vietnamese counterparts in 2010.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, President Obama and Secretary General Trong agreed to step up defense and security cooperation with increase defense trade and information sharing to include discussion on ITAR restrictions.<sup>63</sup> Based on economic and strategic reasons, it is important that Vietnam continues to pursue improved relations with the U.S. vice versa the U.S. should nurture the relationship with Vietnam if it is to continue its pivot to the Pacific.

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*Foreign Service Journal*, April 2015, accessed May 7, 2016, <http://www.afsa.org/vietnam-today>.

<sup>61</sup> Thayer.

<sup>62</sup> Bellacqua, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Thayer.

Conversely, China is well aware of the consequences resulting from an enriched relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam. China's concerns are based on security and historical experience. As with the Sino-Soviet split in 1954 and the subsequent partnering of Vietnam and the Soviet Union, China fears the possibility of encirclement by foreign powers.<sup>64</sup> China believes that an "encirclement" or "contain" China strategy is the underlining motivation for the deepening ties between the U.S. and Vietnam.<sup>65</sup> China also fears that, "Improved U.S. ties with Vietnam and ASEAN will undermine China's Southeast Asia policy objectives."<sup>66</sup> U.S. involvement in Asia and the Pacific region, for the moment, helps keep China contained and unable to maneuver unchecked in the region, "The U.S. provides Vietnam and other ASEAN members with a security blanket against the relentless tide of Chinese intimidation. With the presence of U.S. involvement in Asia and the Pacific, Beijing is tempered in its ability to push its agenda unopposed."<sup>67</sup> Finally, the continued Sino-Vietnamese tension, especially in the South China Sea, provides the U.S. additional justification to sustain a forward military presence in the region.<sup>68</sup> U.S. military cooperation with Vietnam, from military exchange programs such as the Oregon National Guard State Partnership Program, to the port visits by U.S. navy and merchant ships have indicated intent by the U.S. to remain focus in the region.

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<sup>64</sup> Bellacqua, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



If the U.S. is favoring a military strengthening of Vietnam, the question is in what aspect, the Army or the Navy? From the Vietnamese government point of view this answer would be the Navy, “Vietnam’s essential strategy has been to build up its navy through strategic partnerships and high-profile procurement deals.”<sup>69</sup> Vietnam is pursuing deals with Russia and India to co-produce the BrahMos anti-ship cruise missile and to “Westernize” its navy to allow for greater interoperability with regional navies.<sup>70</sup> The Spratly Islands dispute has brought Vietnam and China back to the realm of another border conflict. This time however, the dispute involves other countries, including the U.S., Taiwan, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Tensions over control of the Spratly Islands have already resulted in armed clashes between Vietnam and China. In 1988, a clash between Vietnamese and Chinese naval forces near the Spratly Islands resulted in the death of 70 Vietnamese sailors. More recently in June 2015, three separate incidents of Chinese naval vessels firing on and seizing Vietnamese fishing boats operating in the South China Sea were reported. China is also applying pressure on Vietnam over the Spratly Islands by coercing Exxon Mobil and British Petroleum, in 2008 and 2009 respectively, to end exploration and extraction of oil from the disputed region.<sup>71</sup> China has since raised the stakes for control of the

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<sup>69</sup> Abhijit Singh, “Vietnam’s Modernizing Navy confronts China’s Sea Power,” *World Politics Review*, November 19, 2014, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/14491/vietnam-s-modernizing-navy-confronts-china-s-sea-power>.

<sup>70</sup> Wendell Minnick, “Vietnam Pushes Modernization as China Challenge Grows,” *Defense News*, August 31, 2015, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/08/30/vietnam-pushes-modernization-china-challenge-grows/32042259/>.

<sup>71</sup> Beardson, 357.

Spratly Islands by issuing a “non-negotiability” declaration for the disputed islands, “Retired Chinese army Major General Luo Yuan said in 2012 that ‘China’s patience has been tested to its limits, and there is no room for further tolerance.’”<sup>72</sup> This type of rhetoric is meant to intimidate other Asian countries and send a message to the U.S. that the South China Sea is China’s domain.

Vietnam has responded in typical fashion by increasing the size and capability of its navy. Hanoi is adopting a deterrent and denial strategy toward the larger and more capable Chinese navy by acquiring Kilo-class submarines from Russia.<sup>73</sup> The submarines employ stealth technology to maximize its effectiveness and therefore provides a psychological deterrent to the Chinese navy. Lyle J. Goldstein of *The National Interest* publication suggests that the new submarines pose a threat to the protection and effectiveness of China’s navy and potentially to the balance in the South China Sea.<sup>74</sup> Goldstein notes that China’s analysis of the strategic impact of the submarines is that the “sea lanes of communications” can be threatened within five to six years.<sup>75</sup>

Vietnam is also purchasing six corvettes and two Gepard-class frigates from Russia and is expected to take possession of the ships in 2016 to round out its coastal defense fleet. These classes of ships are smaller, faster, and multi-purpose type naval

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Greg Torode, “Vietnam building deterrent against china in disputed seas with submarines,” *Reuters*, September 7, 2014, accessed April 5, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-submarines-china-insight-idUSKBN0H20SF20140907>.

<sup>74</sup> Lyle J. Goldstein, “China’s Nightmare: Vietnam’s New Killer Submarines,” *The National Interest*, March 29, 2015, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-nightmare-vietnams-new-killer-submarines-12505>.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

vessels that are able to counter China's presence in the disputed waters. Corvette class navy ships are just below the frigate class of ships, and are small, lethal, and quick. The Corvette class ships have the capability of simultaneously engaging and destroying multiple surface targets. In addition, because of its speed, up to 70 km/hr, and endurance of up to ten days without resupply, the Corvettes class ships provide the Vietnamese with capability of a rapid and sustained response to threats. The Gepard-class frigate provides anti-submarine, air-defense, and maritime patrol and interdiction capabilities that augment the Vietnamese littoral region. Both class of ships will provide the needed threat to the Chinese fleet operating in the South China Sea.<sup>76</sup>

Enhancing Vietnam's ability to acquire naval capabilities is the 2007 decision by the U.S. to allow the sale of some nonlethal equipment to Vietnam, "Last December [2007], on a visit to Vietnam, Mr. Kerry [U.S. Secretary of State] announced that Washington would provide \$18 million in assistance, including five unarmed patrol boats for the Vietnamese Coast Guard."<sup>77</sup> The announcement in part is the further relaxation in the ITAR policy by the U.S. to help strengthen U.S.-Vietnamese posture in the South China Sea, "The latest shift by the United States policy . . . is aimed at further strengthening Vietnam's Coast Guard and would open the door for Vietnam to acquire armed boats or even surveillance planes from the United States."<sup>78</sup> China has responded

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<sup>76</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "Vietnam's Navy Adds 2 Russian-Design Missile Ships," *The Diplomat*, June 3, 2015, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/vietnams-navy-adds-2-russian-design-missile-ships/>.

<sup>77</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Eases Embargo on Arms to Vietnam," *New York Times*, October 24, 2014, accessed January 6, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/world/asia/us-eases-embargo-on-arms-to-vietnam.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/world/asia/us-eases-embargo-on-arms-to-vietnam.html?_r=0).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

by increasing, numbers unknown, the number of frigates in its fleet that operates in the South China Sea.

The take-away from this naval chess game is that Vietnam is willing to stand firm against China's aggressiveness, while countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, Japan, India, and Indonesia are reticent to alienate or confront China.<sup>79</sup> Vietnam's continued willingness to be the 'stone in the sandal' of China proves that it is worth pursuing Vietnam as a partner to moderate Chinese behavior.

The move to improve naval capabilities by Vietnam also demonstrates that China will respond accordingly. In November 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam to address the growing tensions between the two countries over the Spratly Islands. President Xi sought a peaceful and bilateral agreement with Vietnam to the dispute in the South China Sea.<sup>80</sup> However, Vietnam is split on the purpose of the negotiations with China. The more conservative elements of the Vietnamese Communist Party does not trust any long term negotiations with China and seeks a more robust relationship with the U.S., "see[ing] the U.S. presence as a hedge against China's rising military power."<sup>81</sup> That China is willing to have discussions with Vietnam indicates that China grudgingly considers their neighbor a potential threat but at the same time a necessary trade partner. Economic trade relations plays a significant role in influencing

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<sup>79</sup> Beardson, 356.

<sup>80</sup> Shawn W. Crispin, "China's Xi Misses the Mark on Vietnam Visit: The limits of the President's well-timed trip to restore Beijing's position," *The Diplomat*, November 6, 2015, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/chinas-xi-misses-the-mark-on-vietnam-visit/>.

<sup>81</sup> Kaplan, 55.

China's policy toward Vietnam. During President Xi's visit, China and Vietnam signed over 12 bilateral agreements, to include loans worth over a half a billion dollars, for new infrastructure construction.<sup>82</sup> It seems at the present that Beijing may be sensitive to any potential disruption in its economic growth and willing to set aside minor military disputes.

### A Proven Strategy: The Soviet Union and India

The desire to counter-balance China is not a new strategy for the region. It has been employed in recent history by two other countries. The former Soviet Union attempted containment during the Sino-Soviet split and India is currently implementing this strategy against Beijing.

Relations between China and the Soviet Union began to sour in 1954 when ideological differences began to surface. By 1960, the split was evident and verbal attacks by Beijing and Moscow were played out in public.<sup>83</sup> During this time, the Soviet Union was immersed in its Cold War with the U.S. Hoping to avoid a nuclear war, they and the U.S. engaged in dialogue to reduce tensions. As a side benefit of this dialogue, the Soviet Union took the opportunity to argue against China's quest to obtain nuclear weapons. At the same time, Moscow pursued an alliance with the newly formed government in Hanoi. In 1976, they entered into a partnership for economic and military

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<sup>82</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "China, Vietnam Seek to Move Past South China Sea Disputes," *The Diplomat*, November 6, 2015, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/china-vietnam-seek-to-move-past-south-china-sea-disputes/>.

<sup>83</sup> Royal Air Force Museum, "National Cold War Exhibition: Sino-Soviet Split," accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.nationalcoldwarexhibition.org/schools-colleges/national-curriculum/detente/sino-soviet-split.aspx>.

aid. Soviet troops were already postured along their extensive border with China, occupying a significant number of Chinese troops, and Moscow sought to apply additional pressure on China through an alliance with Vietnam as part of an evolving encirclement of China.<sup>84</sup> Beijing rightly viewed this new alliance as an encirclement strategy and a potential threat to its borders.

India recognizes the importance of Vietnam in dealing with China. India is reaching back into Southeast Asia in the belief that it is essential to their national and security interest. India identifies Vietnam as a key partnership that can be used during negotiations with China. Starting in 1998, India aggressively moved to establish new partnerships with Vietnam. These partnerships included trade agreements, investments, security training, and military cooperation.<sup>85</sup> In 2000, Vietnam and India signed a military cooperation agreement to develop closer relations with the countries' defense industry, begin joint naval exercises in the South China Sea, and jungle warfare and counter-insurgency training with the army.<sup>86</sup>

The economic and military alliance is another example of the strategic value of Vietnam as a counter-balance to China, "Strategically, to put it more bluntly, Vietnam offers India a long range option of developing and sustaining a vital strategic counter-pressure point against China. If China persists and can have a Pakistan in South Asia as a pressure point, then India too needs a strategic counter-pressure on China's periphery,

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<sup>84</sup> Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>85</sup> Beardson, 358.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

and Vietnam should be wooed for this purpose.”<sup>87</sup> The cooperation between the two countries has mutual benefits. India is pushing for Vietnam to gain a greater role in the international community by supporting its bid to be a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and in turn Vietnam supports India’s goal of becoming a permanent member of the Security Council.<sup>88</sup>

Can the U.S. implement a similar “containment’ or counter-balance strategy on China? The U.S. has a willing partner in Vietnam to attempt such a strategy. Mutual interest in containing China to protect commerce and military balance in the region are shared by both the U.S. and Vietnam. With budget cuts here, the U.S. can no longer provide endless military resources to protect international trade and security, therefore, must find innovative solutions to counter-balancing China.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusion: Vietnam is a Viable Option

I recommend that the U.S. consider a more robust partnership with Vietnam to counter-balance China. The U.S. should seek an enduring political, economic, and military relationship with Vietnam to remain relevant and influential in Asia and the Pacific. Developing political and economic relationships with Vietnam is beyond the scope of this research and are recommended topics for complementary research. I have provided recommendations focused on the military aspect in regards to the instruments of national power.

#### Recommendations

The four recommendations put forth for consideration are:

1. Increase the use of the National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP).
2. Invite Vietnam to participate in military exercises in the Pacific region.
3. Increase military aid to Vietnam by reapportioning aid from the Philippines.
4. Remove Vietnam from the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) list.

#### Increase the use of National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP)

The State's, territories', and District of Columbia's National Guard consist of the Army and Air Force components. The Navy does not contribute to the militia forces of the National Guard. Since 2003 the Army National Guard and Army Reserve have been a major contributor to the war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Proving to the Nation and



Active Army supporters that the Reserve forces are willing and capable of participating in America's conflicts. In 2009, then Army Chief of Staff, General George W. Casey, began the transition of moving the Army National Guard and Army Reserve from a strategic force to a more capable and available operational force. General Casey's vision was to have the Reserve forces manned, trained, and equipped at the same levels as the Active force in order to be better prepared for immediate mobilization.

In addition to providing ready combat power, the Army National Guard brings another unique program to the table which is the State Partnership Program. According to the Army National Guard's State Partnership Program website, the program is a low cost effort guided by the State Department foreign policy goals, administered by the National Guard Bureau, and executed by the State Adjutants Generals in support of Combatant Commanders.<sup>89</sup> Starting in 1991, the State Partnership Program has paired States with former Soviet Bloc nations to, "facilitate cooperation across all aspects of international civil-military affairs and encouraging people-to-people ties at the state level."<sup>90</sup> As of 2015, there were 76 partnerships with 48 National Guard states to include the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Island. Of interest, the Oregon Army National Guard has an enduring partnership program with Vietnam.

Utilizing the Army National Guard's SPP can help offset some of the pressure from budget constraints imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011, "The SPP is a tangible solution to help fill the gap between policy platitudes and quantitative

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<sup>89</sup> National Guard, "National Guard State Partnership Program," accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.nationalguard.mil/Leadership/JointStaff/J5/InternationalAffairsDivision/StatePartnershipProgram.aspx>.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

measurements of U.S. commitment to the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>91</sup> Admiral James Stavridis, former EUCOM Commander states that, “The State Partnership Program is a very powerful tool. It is unmatched. They are, bang for the buck, one of the best things going. Anything that enhances state partnership is money in the bank for the regional combatant commanders.”<sup>92</sup> The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) is an under-utilized resource which are readily available to the nine Unified Combatant Commanders. The employment of SPP can be a valuable tool for the Combatant Commanders to use in order to meet their security cooperation objectives, “The SPP, especially by expanding into Asia, is an “off-the-shelf” remedy to the suggestions prescribed by the QDR, NSS, and NMS.”<sup>93</sup>

SPP became a Program of Record in October 2009 is one of six programs that the Department of Defense has identified as a “key partnership development efforts.”<sup>94</sup> Becoming a Program of Record is significant because it allows SPP to compete for resources each year during the defense budgeting process. SPP funding in FY14 was \$14.3 million out of a defense budget of \$661 billion. The \$14.3 million funds over 700 engagements annually to support military exercises, however, the majority of the

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<sup>91</sup> Lt. Col. Brian K. Bergeron, USAF, “Leveraging the National Guard’s State Partnership Program in the United States’ Rebalance Toward Asia” (Thesis, Air War College, Montgomery, AL, 2014), 3.

<sup>92</sup> National Guard.

<sup>93</sup> Bergeron, 5.

<sup>94</sup> William B. Boehm, *The National Guard State Partnership Program: Forging and Maintaining Effective Security Cooperation Partnership for the 21st Century* (Arlington, VA: Historical Services Branch, Office of Public Affairs, National Guard Bureau, 2014), 55.

engagements are in U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and only 10 percent in the USPACOM region, “The current composition of the SPP in Asia suggest room for expansion.”<sup>95</sup>

Currently there are eight SPPs in the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) region, with Vietnam being one of the eight and partnering with Oregon in 2012. The Oregon National Guard engagements with their Vietnamese counterparts include disaster management, search and rescue, hazardous materials management, mass casualty medical training, and incident command system training.<sup>96</sup> However, the Oregon National Guard has much more to offer to their counterparts in Vietnam. The 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) and the 3rd Battalion of the 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team (CBCT) with multiple deployments and combat experience resides in the Oregon Army National Guard. Future activities between the two partners can include: deployment training, border, port, and aviation security, defense reform and military modernization efforts, and Leadership development. These enduring activities can lead to more robust engagement such as co-deployments and full spectrum military exercises.

The Army National Guard is essential in the budget constrained environment, a proposal by the DOD to place another Stryker brigade in the Army National Guard is an indication of a rebalancing not only within the Army but to the Pacific. The Pennsylvania Army National Guard currently has the 56th Stryker brigade in the 28 Infantry Division. The DOD’s proposal would establish the second Army National Guard Stryker Brigade on the West coast by converting the Washington National Guard’s 81st ABCT into a

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<sup>95</sup> Bergeron, 12.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 14.

SBCT. Washington State Senator Steve Hobbs spearheaded a bill requesting that President Obama allow the transformation of the brigade which will support several national security goals, "The stationing of the SBCT on the West Coast would reinforce the Asia-Pacific rebalance and enhances the National Guard's homeland defense mission." Research completed at the Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, validates the State's request, "This geographic proximity, along with long established habitual training relationships with I Corps and Joint Base Lewis-McChord [Washington State], is another positive cost factor and multiplier."<sup>97</sup>

Along the same lines of rebalancing to gain efficiency is the Army's regionally aligned forces (RAF.) Regionally aligned forces is a total force concept that includes Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve capabilities. These units are made available to Combatant Commanders for supporting regional operations. Regionally aligned force units are capable of conducting operational missions, bilateral and multilateral military exercises, and theater security cooperation activities in support of a Combatant Commander.<sup>98</sup> As diminishing resources in the Army's budget continue, regionally aligned force units provide a scalable and tailorable force for immediate utilization. The regionally aligned forces are in line with the 2010 National Security Strategy of developing stronger ties with allies and partners. National Guard units are

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<sup>97</sup> Gregory L. Cantwell, Ph.D., Colonel Mark E. Orwat, Colonel Tam D. Warren, "Regionally Aligned Forces: Concept Viability and Implementation" (Carlisle Compendia of Collaborative Research, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2015), accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/carlislecompendia>.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

integrated into the RAF rotation and provide the additional resources necessary to make this rebalancing of forces possible.

The reserve component [National Guard] also offers significant advantages by aligning units with GCCs . . . the Army should build on the existing state partnership program and have National Guard units strengthen their formal and long-term relationships with partner nations. . . . Additionally, useful doctrine should also incorporate some of the State Partnership Program (SPP) National Guard Brigades' techniques and procedures as models. . . . The Regional Alignment of Forces incorporates what the National Guard has been doing for the last two decades in the SPP and expands it significantly. SPP played a major part in the first successful RAF missions to AFRICOM. "We in Africa Command rely on members of the Army and Air National Guard every day to accomplish our mission," said AFRICOM Commander General Carter Ham. The benefits and use of the Guard as a Regionally Aligned Force have been detailed by others . . . SPP will remain a critical aspect of RAF and may be expanded.<sup>99</sup>

However, there are risks associated with expanding the National Guard's SPP into Asia. Beijing keeps a close watch on Hanoi's military interactions with new strategic partners such as India, Japan, and the U.S., "These [military exercises] are likely to be closely monitored by China, even if the exercises take place in waters or air zones other than the South China Sea; Beijing has often been hostile to new Vietnamese partnerships."<sup>100</sup> Beijing considers Washington's freedom of navigation efforts, military bases in Okinawa and Guam, and the deployment of the high-tech THAAD missile defense system to South Korea as provocative.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, China deems the U.S. as

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<sup>99</sup> Cantwell, Orwat, and Warren.

<sup>100</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, "A China-Vietnam Military Clash: Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 26," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 2015, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-vietnam-military-clash/p37029>.

<sup>101</sup> Duncan Hewitt, "US Risks Provoking Further Militarization of South China Sea, Should Recognize China's 'Rights' As Major Power: Chinese Media," *International Business Times*, February 24, 2016, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/us-risks-provoking-further-militarization-south-china-sea-should-recognize-chinas-2320818>.

the aggressor and responsible for militarizing the region.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, displaying a less aggressive military approach by the U.S. is required. The partnership between Vietnam and Oregon can be a solution and may be viewed to be non-threatening, “It is widely believed by officials at the U.S. Embassy that the Vietnamese government viewed a formal relationship with the National Guard much more palatable than one with U.S. active duty forces because it would be viewed as less aggressive in eyes of the Chinese.”<sup>103</sup>

Invite Vietnam to participate in military exercises  
in the Pacific region

The importance of military cooperation and partners cannot be underestimated, “A corollary effort is strengthening the independent security capacity of key ‘partner states’ through more flexible security assistance mechanisms and through cooperative counter-terrorism, counter-drug, and counter-insurgency operations. The White House and DOD have stressed their desire to increase training and joint exercises with allies and new military partners, in order to “ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests.”<sup>104</sup>

Military exercises within Asia and the Pacific region should include Vietnamese involvement. Currently, the U.S. and Vietnam participate in naval exercises and have done so since relations normalized in 1995. The naval exercises included port visits,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Bergeron, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Robert G. Sutter, *The United States and Asia: Regional Dynamics and Twenty-First-Century Relations* (New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 81.

search and rescue coordination, medical support, and coastal defense training. But there are no joint exercises between the U.S. and Vietnam involving their armies. However, there are precedents of the U.S. Army's participation in joint exercises in the region to include: Exercises Orient Shield, Yam Sukura (Japan), Keris Strike (Malaysia), Tiger Balm (Thailand), Garuda Shield (Indonesia), and Angkor Sentinel (Cambodia.) These joint military exercises will help boost interoperability, facilitate military cooperation and understanding, and build stronger bonds between the armies resulting in efficient and effective partnerships.

#### Exercises Orient Shield and Yama Sukura

Exercises Orient Shield and Yama Sukura are annual exercises involving U.S. and Japanese ground self-defense forces. Orient Shield is focused on improving combat planning readiness at the battalion level, while increasing company and platoon tactical level experience through the exchange of ideas, tactics, techniques, and military experiences.<sup>105</sup> The annual training improves on the real-world contingency planning between U.S. forces and Japanese ground self-defense forces. Units from the Army National Guard routinely participate in Orient Shield, building enduring relationships with their Japanese counterparts. The Yama Sakura exercise is a simulation driven, command post focus training designed to enhance U.S. and Japanese combat readiness and interoperability while strengthening relationships and demonstrating U.S. resolve to

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<sup>105</sup> Master Sgt. Corine Lombardo, "American, Japanese forces officially begin Orient Shield 2104," accessed March 5, 2016, [http://www.army.mil/article/137018/American\\_\\_Japanese\\_forces\\_officially\\_begin\\_Orient\\_Shield\\_2014/](http://www.army.mil/article/137018/American__Japanese_forces_officially_begin_Orient_Shield_2014/).

support the security interests of allies and partners in the region.<sup>106</sup> Yama Sakura is the largest U.S. Army bilateral exercise in Asia and the Pacific region, typically involving over 4,500 JGSDF and 2,000 U.S. forces. Although both exercises are Japanese focus, a similar construct for a military exercise with Vietnam should be developed.

#### Exercise Keris Strike, Tiger Balm, Garuda Shield

For the first time in September 2014, during Keris Strike 14, U.S. Army Stryker vehicles from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division participated in this annual exercise between Malaysian and U.S. forces. The deployment of Strykers for this exercise allowed the Malaysian army to gain valuable training on mounted operations such as patrol tactics, react to small arms fire, ambushes, and counter-IED tactics.<sup>107</sup> This type of mounted training could be simulated with Vietnamese forces in order to increase their effectiveness. Exercises Tiger Balm and Garuda Shield are similar in scope that involve Thai and Indonesian forces respectively with the U.S. Army.

#### Exercise Angkor Sentinel

Finally, one exercise that may be of most benefit for relations and capacity building is Exercise Angkor Sentinel conducted in Cambodia with U.S. forces. Angkor Sentinel is an annual bilateral exercise sponsored by U.S. Army Pacific and hosted by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces that focuses on providing humanitarian assistance and

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<sup>106</sup> Yama Sakura 61, accessed March 5, 2016, <https://www.usarpac.army.mil/ys61/>.

<sup>107</sup> Sgt. 1st Class Adora Gonzalez, “Keris Strike 14 wraps up in Malaysia,” accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.army.mil/article/134825/>.



responding to disasters.<sup>108</sup> Exercise Angkor Sentinel provides benefits on many levels. First, the Idaho National Guard, part of the National Guard's SPP, participates in this annual exercise, and is a testament to the impact and effectiveness of the National Guard's SPP. The Oregon Army National Guard has a State partnership program with Vietnam and in theory, could conduct a similar exercise with Vietnamese forces. Second, the proximity of the exercise to Vietnam could be of benefit. Concurrent exercise could involve cross-border collaboration to promote restoring relations between Vietnam and Cambodia.

Washington risk antagonizing Beijing with similar joint military exercise with Vietnamese ground and air forces, "[combat type] maneuvers risk further straining relations with China at a time when tensions already are high because of disputes over the South China Sea."<sup>109</sup> U.S. and Vietnamese forces currently participate in noncombat related training such as search and rescue, medical support, and disaster management and "are wary of going too far and possibly antagonizing China."<sup>110</sup> The joint exercise could support Beijing's claim that Washington is to blame for the militarization of the territory.<sup>111</sup> Washington must accept this risk because China is not waning in its

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<sup>108</sup> Staff Sergeant Christopher McCullough, "US, Cambodia partner for Exercise Angkor sentinel 2015," accessed March 10, 2016, [http://www.army.mil/article/144595/US\\_\\_Cambodia\\_partner\\_for\\_Exercise\\_Angkor\\_Sentinel\\_2015/](http://www.army.mil/article/144595/US__Cambodia_partner_for_Exercise_Angkor_Sentinel_2015/).

<sup>109</sup> Patrick Barta, "U.S., Vietnam in Exercises Amid Tensions with China," *Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 2011, accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304223804576447412748465574>.

<sup>110</sup> Barta.

<sup>111</sup> Coco Alcuaz, "South China Sea Dispute: China Blames 'Militarization' on Others, Reminds US of Vietnam, Korea Wars," *International Business Times*, March 8,

aggressive posture, “Beijing is increasingly demonstrating to Hanoi that it aspires to regional hegemony and will trample the rights of any country that stands in its way.”<sup>112</sup> Signifying the acceptance of this risk, the U.S. and Vietnam are strengthening their military ties, “the countries increased the frequency of their joint military exercises and high-level government visits.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, the U.S. should seek to create a joint military exercise that includes Vietnamese ground and air forces which incorporates combat focused training, “The United States should integrate Vietnam deeper into its other regional security relationships, including by encouraging it to co-develop weapons, inviting it to participate in multilateral military exercises and to conduct joint naval patrols, and incentivizing it to buy U.S., European and Japanese arms.”<sup>114</sup>

Increase military aid to Vietnam by reappportioning aid from the Philippines.

“The Pentagon has announced it is committing \$119 million this year to help develop Southeast Asian maritime capabilities and will provide \$140 million next year to allies, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines.”<sup>115</sup> The U.S. is

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2016, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/south-china-sea-dispute-china-blames-militarization-others-reminds-us-vietnam-korea-2332091>.

<sup>112</sup> Alexander Benard and Paul J. Leaf, “Why the United States and Vietnam Urgently Need to Deepen Ties,” *The National Interest*, September 11, 2015, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-the-united-states-vietnam-urgently-need-deepen-ties-13816>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Manuel Mogato, “U.S. raises military aid to Philippines amid sea tension with China,” *Reuters*, November 25, 2015, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-philippines-usa-idUSKBN0TE0WO20151125>.

backing its commitment of refocusing back to Asia and the Pacific region with military aid. However, is the amount enough and is it distributed to the right Southeast Asian countries?

Washington allocated \$40 million in 2014 and will increase military aid to \$79 million in 2015 to the Philippines amid rising tension in the South China Sea. The aid will focus on building navy and air force capacity. U.S. and the Philippines military cooperation has been ongoing since 1898 and continues today under a mutual defense treaty between the two countries since 1951. However, with rising tensions with Beijing, Manila is expecting increased U.S. involvement, “As a result, government officials in Manila have been patiently waiting for the United States to ratchet up the diplomatic and military pressure on Beijing to end the hostilities.”<sup>116</sup> The Philippines is one of the largest recipients of military aid in the region yet continues to lobby for U.S. involvement dealing with Beijing. Manila feels that they are being harassed by Chinese forces during resupply and troop rotation operations around the Second Thomas Shoal located in the South China Sea and request that the U.S. provide surveillance and reconnaissance assets to aid in the operations.<sup>117</sup>

Conversely, military aid to Vietnam from the U.S. was \$33 million and \$16 million in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The \$33 million in 2014 was part of Secretary of State John Kerry’s commitment of greater investment in the Vietnamese navy for maritime security efforts however, 2015 military aid amounts has declined due to fiscal

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<sup>116</sup> Siddhartha Mahanta, “The Philippines to the United States: We want you back,” *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2015, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/01/philippines-china-military-carter/>.

<sup>117</sup> Mogato.

constraints. In light of reduced military aid from the U.S., Hanoi has negotiated a \$100 million line of credit for defense purchases with India. Reports indicate that Vietnam would use a portion of the line of credit for the anti-ship variant of India's BrahMos cruise missile which is a short range supersonic cruise missile capable of being launched from submarines, ships, and aircraft or from land.<sup>118</sup> This acquisition will give Vietnam the counter-strike capabilities against sea and land base threats and validates Hanoi's stance in opposition to China's brashness in the region.

Experts in Southeast Asian affairs such as Samuel Ramani of the *Huffpost Politics* supports the notion of increasing military aid to Vietnam. He suggests the U.S. take a two-prong approach in response to Chinese military assertiveness. The first prong is a co-optive deterrence using diplomatic avenues and continued military cooperation efforts to smooth Beijing's military aggressiveness.<sup>119</sup> This first prong approach is beyond the scope of this research and is a recommended topic for further research. The second prong to Ramani's plan suggest cultivating relationships with Southeast Asian countries, "sharpening the 'Pivot to Asia' to Southeast Asian countries directly threatened by an aggressive China like Vietnam and the Philippines."<sup>120</sup> Ramani seems to suggest that cultivating the alliance with Vietnam and the Philippines could help dampen Chinese

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<sup>118</sup> Military Periscope, "Vietnam Armed Forces Structure Overview," accessed March 12, 2016, <https://www.militaryperiscope.com/nations/seasia/vietnam/organzn/index.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Samuel Ramani, "How the US Should Respond to Chinese Military Assertiveness in 2015," *Huffpost Politics*, March 8, 2015, accessed March 20, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/how-the-us-should-respond\\_b\\_6419498.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/how-the-us-should-respond_b_6419498.html).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

aggressive nature in the South China Sea. Ramani cautions the U.S. of reducing aid to Southeast Asian countries and points to the example of Thailand. In 2014, the U.S. reduced aid to Thailand resulting in Thailand and China entering into a \$12 billion rail project which in turn increases China's economic and military influence in the region. Ramani suggest that the U.S. can counter this setback by, "consolidating a strategic partnership with Vietnam."<sup>121</sup>

Whereas the Philippines request direct military involvement from the U.S. to protect against Chinese aggression, Vietnam is confronting China without the request for direct U.S. involvement. The ability and willingness of Hanoi to confront Beijing's aggression, both on land and in the South China Sea, should indicate to Washington that an increase in military aid to Vietnam would be more advantageous, "Hanoi can become one of Washington's best partners to counter Beijing's rise. And Vietnam would be a strong military partner for the United States, having often successfully confronted bigger and better-armed foes."<sup>122</sup> For this reason the U.S. should reapportion military aid from the Philippines to Vietnam.

The reapportion of military aid away from a long standing ally would risk alienating one of America's oldest partners in Asia. Coupled with upcoming presidential elections in both the Philippines and the U.S. in 2016, it could stress U.S.-Philippine alliance.<sup>123</sup> In addition, as mentioned above in regards to Thailand's cooperation with

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Benard and Leaf.

<sup>123</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "Why the Philippines Is Critical to the US Rebalance to Asia," *The Diplomat*, April 7, 2016, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://the-diplomat.com/2016/04/why-the-philippines-is-critical-to-the-us-rebalance-to-asia/>.

China, the Philippines could seek to do the same to ensure a favorable position with Beijing, “The extent to which this is true will affect not only the calculations of both sides, but also those of China with some continuing to believe that the next Philippine president might be willing to pursue closer ties with Beijing in spite of its South China Sea behavior.”<sup>124</sup> It is advantageous for the U.S. to preserve the alliance with the Philippines for historical and strategic importance. Therefore, any reapportionment of aid from the Philippines to Vietnam will have to be implemented in small increments and sensitive to political backlash. This is a risk that the U.S. can absorb and therefore should pursue.

Remove Vietnam from the International Traffic in  
Arms Regulation (ITAR) list.

Up until the Clinton administration normalized relations with Hanoi, the U.S. assumed an unfavorable and denial policy toward Vietnam. In 1984, the U.S. State Department imposed restrictions on the sale and sharing of defense and military related technologies by placing Vietnam on the ITAR list. The restrictions incurred by being on the list and the lack of availability of cheap weapons after the fall of the Soviet Union hampered Vietnam’s ability to modernize its military. Richard Bitzinger, a senior fellow and coordinator of the Military Transformations Program at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore notes that, “Vietnam has a huge military, but most of it is still outfitted with weaponry from the 1970s and 1980s, especially the Army . . . and

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

must now invest steadily in acquisitions for the next decade or two if it wants to fully recapitalize its military.”<sup>125</sup>

With the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in 1994, Washington and Hanoi have put the controversial Vietnam War behind them and have entered into a period of renewed rapport. Subsequently in 2007, the United States partially lifted a ban of non-lethal military equipment on a case-by-case bases and in 2014 U.S. Senator John McCain urged further easing of the ban on lethal military assistance to Vietnam. On November 10, 2014 the U.S. State Department amended the ITAR to enable Vietnam to acquire “lethal defense articles” from the U.S. for the purpose of maritime security and domain awareness.<sup>126</sup> A month later, U.S. officials stated that unarmed P-3 maritime surveillance planes could be among the first items sold if the ban were eased.<sup>127</sup>

U.S. policy has since recognized that, “in the best interests of U.S. foreign, national security, and human rights concerns that exports of lethal defense articles and defense services to Vietnam may be authorized on a case-by-case basis when in support of maritime security and domain awareness.”<sup>128</sup> Removing Vietnam from the ITAR list

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<sup>125</sup> Minnick.

<sup>126</sup> Brooke Driver, “State Department Amends ITAR to Allow Certain Defense Exports to Vietnam,” *Export Compliance Training Institute*, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://learnexportcompliance.bluekeyblogs.com/2014/12/30/state-department-amends-itar-to-allow-certain-defense-exports-to-vietnam/>

<sup>127</sup> Military Periscope, *Vietnam Armed Forces Structure Overview*, accessed March 12, 2016, <https://www.militaryperiscope.com/nations/seasia/vietnam/organzn/index.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Laura El-Sabaawi and Lori Scheetz, “State Department Amends ITAR to Allow Certain Exports of Lethal Defense Articles to Vietnam,” *American Trade and Manufacturing*, November 12, 2014, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.ustradeblog.com>.

would allow them to implement ‘Western’ systems which will increase the interoperability with the U.S. and regional forces.<sup>129</sup> So far the relaxation of ITAR addresses maritime security and domain awareness needs however, there exists a need for land base defense equipment such as armored personnel carriers, tanks, artillery, radar, rotary wing aircraft, and air defense missiles to name a few that Vietnam requires to upgrade its military.

If the U.S. lifts the ban on sharing and transferring lethal weapons to Vietnam it risk further militarization of the region. The ability to acquire modern weapon systems and capabilities from the U.S. may embolden Vietnam to further challenge China’s antagonistic strategy which could lead to armed confrontation between the two nations.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, the warmer defense industry cooperation between Washington and Hanoi could raise Vietnam’s expectations of U.S. assistance in a crisis.

Understandably, in the face of Beijing’s actions, the U.S. focus is maritime security and enhancing the ability of littoral states in Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, to defend themselves. But the U.S. should not neglect the true strength of the Vietnamese military which is its army when considering sharing of military technologies and the modernization of land base capabilities. Enabling Vietnam to modernize its army and

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com/2014/11/state-department-amends-itar-to-allow-certain-exports-of-lethal-defense-articles-to-vietnam/.

<sup>129</sup> Wendell Minnick, “Vietnam Pushes Modernization as China Challenge Grows,” *Defense News*, August 31, 2015, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/08/30/vietnam-pushes-modernization-china-challenge-grows/32042259/>.

<sup>130</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, “Armed Clash in the South China Sea: Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 14,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 2012, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/world/armed-clash-south-china-sea/p27883>.



therefore providing a greater threat to China's southern border could persuade Beijing to revisit the balance of defense spending between the army and navy. Since the large standing army provides deterrence to any threat to its land borders, China may shift its focus and resources away from the South China Sea and back to its army. Therefore, the strategy that may keep the balance of power in favor of the U.S. would be to have a holistic approach to modernizing the Vietnamese armed forces by completely removing Vietnam from the ITAR list.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Benard and Leaf.

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